

OUT OF AFRICA

UGANDA PILGRIMAGE: GOING TO MASS

By Susan Fehl, Young Adult

Our first Mass at St. Paul parish in Mukono, Uganda was on a weekday morning at 7:30 am. People came from miles away; many of them walked. I am amazed at the motivation Ugandans have to make it somewhere, even when they don't have a car. Religion is so important to them; you can see it in their actions and in their faces.

The church itself is very simple inside. When walking into the church, we saw benches to sit on with no back supports and we noticed there weren't any kneelers. Surprisingly, we did end up kneeling with the rest of the congregation—on the hard concrete floors.

The part that struck our group the most was the applause at Mass. It wasn't for a homily or for something someone said. It was for the consecration of the bread and wine. For Jesus! When Father Paul held up the host and chalice, there was great joy and everyone clapped to thank Jesus.

When we went up for Holy Communion, I was surprised to receive only the host. Drinking from the chalice was only for the priest.

There wasn't any musical accompaniment at the weekday Masses, but people still sang; our voices were carried high. After the priest left at the end of the Mass, and we had finished our hymn, everyone stayed standing. Then someone in the audience sang and the congregation replied. It was so beautiful. When they were finished, people began to file out.

On Sunday, the church looked a little different, maybe because more people were expected for Sunday Mass. In our honor, the two Sunday Masses were combined so that everyone who came to Mass that day would have a chance to meet us. In the main section there were plastic chairs you would normally only see on a patio. Other parts of the church still had the benches.

At that Mass, two choirs greeted the congregation. They had a small keyboard, a few stringed instruments and drums. You could see joy in their faces as they swayed, clapped and sang praises. The words to most of the songs were projected on the wall of the sanctuary, so the congregation could sing along, and we even attempted to sing the hymns that were in the Lugandan language.

Shortly after returning from Uganda, while at a Mass here at the parish, I sat way in back where there are no kneelers. When we were supposed to kneel, I knelt on the stone floor, as a remembrance of those in Uganda. It sometimes hits me hard, like with a 2x4, that we have so much, yet are often unsatisfied. Sometimes it's difficult to see the blessings we **do** have because we are blinded by what we want or think we need.